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ABSTRACT

Public education has been preoccupied with the rapid development of the physical sciences and mathematics, which place a premium on developing the reasoning processes but not on the adequate construction of value judgments. The purpose of the present program is to provide a means of presenting character education within a curriculum consistent with child development and with the diverse values backgrounds of our culture. The focus of such a curriculum must help a student understand how a decision can be made and how one can learn more about himself and others by observing others make choices. Pilot work has been undertaken by the Unitarian-Universalist Church in the field of ethics and cultural relativity in different parts of the country, and a set of long-range objectives for the development and implementation of these new programs has been constructed. Financial support is being requested for the crucial reevaluation of materials and for training of persons who will put the curriculum into wider use. (DE)

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Program for Implementing Curriculum on Ethical Decision Making

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OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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The Need

The development of character or moral education is one of the most sorely neglected areas in the entire field of education. This is true despite the urgent cries from many public figures for the need for future citizens who not only know 'How to do things' but are able to make moral judgments on 'Whether or not a thing should be done'. A society in rapid change and transition loses the stabilizing influence of tradition. It seems necessary, then, to plan carefully an educational approach that reduces the gap between the rejection of old solutions and the discovery of new ones.

Problems in Developing Character Education

Public education has been preoccupied, and greatly influenced by, the rapid development of the physical sciences and mathematics which place a premium on developing the reasoning processes but not on the adequate construction of value judgments.

Too often 'character education' has been a euphemism for a type of rigid indoctrination in which a set of values, preselected by adults, has been presented to children as the 'truth' to be swallowed whole without critical evaluation by the students. Such an approach can hardly be tolerated in a diverse society with a multitude of varying ideas of right and wrong.

When character education was considered a major role of the family in an agricultural society, the inconsistencies and conflicting points between family

teachings were often obscured because of the relative isolation of various segments of society from another. What Jewish children learned in their family and Episcopalians learned in theirs might be directly contradictory but tolerated because these children might never interact or discuss matters at more than a casual level. Urbanization and easy travel modes now demand that a child not merely be taught the 'right way' but taught how to handle situations or solve problems where men of good will disagree on what the 'right way' is.

Public education, faced with the virtually insoluble problem of picking out either a set of values that everyone agreed with, and hence was trivial, or picking one of the many versions of the 'truth' with its obvious repercussions, abandoned the area almost completely to religious educators.

Religious education itself has not had a highly successful record for a number of reasons which include limited resources and a shortage of trained educational personnel. Another aspect of the limited results had to do with some incorrect assumptions made about the child and his development. Some of the more prominent of these misconceptions were:

1. There was a close conjunction between verbal knowledge and behavior. Therefore, to teach verbal knowledge would be tantamount to influencing human behavior.

2. Teaching children general principles like the Ten Commandments would enable them to apply them successfully to specific situations.

3. Children would automatically apply ethical and moral principles to all of humanity rather than a select and restricted 'in group.'

Purpose and Nature of Program

The purpose of the present program is to provide a means by which some of the avowed purposes of character education would be met in a curriculum that was

consistent with child development and with the diverse value backgrounds of our culture.

Instead of presenting the 'truth' to the student, always a presumptuous act in view of present-day circumstances, we intend instead to provide the student with some tools and skills by which he can explore his own ideas and feelings about issues of importance to his age group and come to his own decisions. Mature conviction regarding ethical conduct and behavior seems to require a personal evaluation of the matter. This does not mean that the individual should not have the benefit of the great minds and hearts of past generations; it does mean that each individual will accept from these past heroes only what he himself feels is appropriate.

One simple goal of such a program is to get the individual to become conscious about his ethical decisions and their implications from a moral standpoint.

While ethics in the abstract represents a system of moral principles or values, ethical conduct usually involves conscious decision making which, in turn, reveals the ordering of values by the individual and a choice between those that are conflicting.

It is thus the decision making process that we wish to focus on the present curriculum where the student will understand how a decision can be made, what are the various requirements for making decisions, and how one can learn more about himself and others by observing themselves and others make choices. The six major components of the current trial curriculum may be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

COMPONENTS OF ETHICAL DECISION MAKING CURRICULUM

Situation: A bully has beaten up a neighbor boy and has left his (the bully's) new baseball behind him. Should we take it? What should we do?

1. Accurate Perception of the Situation

Children are not the best observers in the world and need to have practice in accurate description of the situation. What actually happened? Can we agree on the facts? Who did what to whom? Need help in distinguishing fact from opinion. (It is a fact that the bully hit the boy. It is an opinion that he was wrong to do it.)

2. Sets of Possible Alternatives

Children often think in terms of only two alternatives and overlook other possibilities. Exploration of different sets of alternatives will uncover, sometimes, that an ethical solution lies in unexplored alternatives, such as telling the bully's sister that you were returning the baseball because you thought he would be sorry for what he did.

3. Consequences of Alternatives

In the automatic-reaction life of children, they need to have time to explore the possible consequences of alternatives to see where they lead in order to evaluate the relative merits of alternatives. Not making any decision is a subtle but clear decision in itself and needs to be explored also.

4. Ordering of Values

The decision that should be made ethically is decided by the way in which the child or adult orders his values. If Pete chooses to take the baseball, he places retribution and revenge above stealing. If Mike does not, then his ordering of values is different.

5. Origin of Values

Where do values come from? Our family? Our culture? Our church? Children need to have some historical and moral perspective on how other peoples and other times answered similar ethical problems. In this section, each faith would likely add the material they would feel most appropriate.

6. Should vs. Would

An area of disastrous weakness in children's development is their limited understanding of why people don't act as they speak. An introduction of the basics of human motivation and human needs and how they can cancel out the best of human intentions is needed here.

Program Implementation

The Education department of the Unitarian-Universalist Church has been concerned for some time about the appropriateness of their current Sunday School curriculum. Pilot work has been undertaken in the field of ethics and cultural relativity in values in different parts of the country, and a long-range set of objectives for the development and implementation of these new programs has been established. These are noted in Table 2. The first two stages of the process have been completed. The Estes Park meeting in the Summer of 1966 produced some tentative curriculum materials in the field of ethics (see Appendix A) that will be developed more fully by Reverend Clyde Dodder and his wife from San Francisco who have had experience in preparing materials in this area.

The next step is to establish limited field trials for this curriculum in various church groups during the Spring of 1967 and to evaluate these in a further planning session next summer. The first four stages of this process have been supported by the Religious Education division of the Unitarian-Universalist Church from their limited resources.

It is at this point, following an initial trial, that most attempts at curriculum modification founder through either lack of resources or understanding of the number of steps remaining before an effective implementation can take place.

It is at this place that we are requesting financial support for the crucial steps of reevaluation of materials and of the training of the persons who will place the curriculum into initial use. The Unitarian-Universalist Church has agreed to share the training program with members of other faiths who might be interested in applying such a curriculum in their own churches and who would agree to provide feedback materials and information to the principal investigators. The final evaluation of the programs and field trials, in turn, would be made available to all participants.

Table 2

PLANS FOR SYSTEMATIC IMPLEMENTATION OF CURRICULUM ON ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

	Developmental Planning Stages	Proposed Activities	
I.	Exploration of ethical concepts of sixth graders - Urbana, Illinois	Completed and results published	Done
II.	Meeting of planning group to prepare materials and make initial trial on appropriateness	Writing group of nine persons met for ten days at Estes Park in July, 1966, and produced materials which were given an initial trial on sixth graders	Done
III.	A team of writers assigned to produce materials based on guidelines established at Estes Park meetings	Now in progress - sets of materials planned to be available for small field trial by January 1967	In Progress
IV.	Field trials in six to eight Unitarian-Universalist Sunday Schools arranged for an eight to ten week session with extensive feedback delivered to planning group	Several churches have announced their willingness to cooperate in this field test	Projected
*V.	Reassemble planning group to evaluate feedback from field trials and produce more extensive sets of materials to feed into curriculum	Planned for early Summer, 1967	Projected
*VI.	Conduct two-three week intensive training session for religious education directors and teachers in the implementation of this curriculum	Planned for late Summer, 1967	Projected
VII.	Extensive field test and evaluation based on the experience of those persons involved in summer program	1967-68	Projected
VIII.	Full production and distribution of materials related to the project	Summer and Fall of 1968	Projected

*Stages for which support is being sought

Rationale for Request

Phase V. The Phase V operation--Evaluation of the limited field test operations in Spring 1967--is a necessary function of the planning team. They need to make judgments on how thoroughly each of the materials and components of the program has worked. On the basis of this information, major adjustments may need to be made in the program, new materials designed and new approaches developed.

This refinement, based on feedback information, is a crucial stage in making any curriculum useful. It is this refined version that would be placed before the selected religious educators that would meet in the late summer. Only travel and board and room expenses are asked for this stage with no salary or honorarium deemed necessary.

Phase VI. This stage of the program development should provide knowledgeable educators with the basis for introducing the curriculum into their church settings. These persons might not teach the curriculum directly but would be responsible for overseeing that program.

The nature of the two week training program will be to provide the participants with an opportunity to become acquainted with the curriculum, to observe the curriculum being presented to a group of children, to have practice in developing materials which would fit into the curriculum and extend it, and to discuss the theoretical background of the program. (Two weeks, while a short time, may be as much as we can get from these persons who have many other responsibilities.) All of these components have been used in successful summer training programs for various curriculum materials.

The environment in which this should take place would be a retreat-like setting where the participants would live, work and play together for the

two-week or ten-day period. A state park, YMCA camp or similar environment would be desirable.

The value of providing a stipend for the participant is manyfold. Not only does it commit the individual to a high effort during the training program and ensures that the curriculum will be used in a school program, but also makes much easier the collection of necessary feedback information during the year ahead. It also allows the program leaders to choose those persons whose positions or personalities provide the maximum chance for the program to be adopted.

The make-up of the training program would be roughly as follows:

8:30 - 9:00	Planning for demonstration classes, discussion of day's objectives, etc.
9:00 - 10:30	Observation of demonstration class
	Break
11:00 - 12:00	Discussion of the class session, discussion of alternatives, discussion of next steps tomorrow
	Lunch
1:15 - 3:00	General lecture and discussion of the area of child development, ethical and moral development of children, development of the curriculum
3:00 - 4:00	Individual projects; development of materials for use in their own settings

Evenings would generally be left free for informal socializing and discussions. The tendency sometimes has been to try to fill every second with organized activities or training lessons. Such attempts ignore what is known about both how productive thinking is accomplished and human endurance. Optional evening sessions may be made available for those with special interests.

The summer workshop would include instructions on how to collect feedback data for further refinement and expansion. A research request for additional help on the process of evaluation would be applied for to NICHD if this request were accepted.

Table 3

BUDGET

Ethical Decision Making Curriculum Planning

PHASE V			
Evaluation of Field Test and Materials Production Phase (6 days in early June 1967; held at some camp or park retreat setting)			
Round-trip Travel Expenses - 10 participants and their families ($250 average)	$ 2,500.00		
Board and Room - 10 participants and their families for 6 days	1,500.00		
Stipends - none	0,000.00		
Sub Total	$ 4,000.00	$ 4,000.00	V
PhASE VI			
Two Week Intensive Training Sessions (late summer 1967)			
Professional Staff			
Director	$ 800.00		
Assistant Director	600.00		
Demonstration Teacher	400.00		
Secretary	250.00		
	$ 2,050.00		
Participants			
Stipend - 40 at $75 per week	$ 6,000.00		
Room and Board - 12 days at $15 per day	7,200.00		
Travel (average $100 round-trip)	4,000.00		
	$17,200.00		
Sub Total		$19,250.00	VI
TOTAL REQUEST		$23,250.00	